

Faith Based and Community Initiatives



USDA
2008

United States
Department of
Agriculture

Aid for Friends

Seniors' Farmers Market Nutrition Program



A Story of Success.

Sr. Baergas is an 88-year old resident of North Philadelphia. He jokes that, "sometimes my mind

doesn't always work the way I want it to." A crippling disability has greatly restricted Sr. Baergas' ability to get around his modest row home. Homebound, he passes the time of day watching television in his wheelchair. His large extended family lives in Puerto Rico but he has no one to rely on to provide regular care. Without the Aid for Friends Network to provide meals and companionship, he would have no resources available to him. Sr. Baergas qualifies to participate in the Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP). However, his inability to leave the house makes it impossible for him to get to a participating farmers market to redeem his benefits.

Two years ago Aid for Friends, in cooperation with federal, state, and

local agencies, was able to act as an intermediary to provide Sr. Baergas with the benefits of the SFMNP. Now, Sr. Baergas enjoys both the companionship of the folks from Aid for Friends and fresh fruits and vegetables. He proclaimed that this program is "a blessing from God."

Sr. Baergas supplements his diet with his own freshly grown tomatoes--his chickens provide him with fresh eggs. In addition, the Seniors Farmers' Market Nutrition Program provides him with a healthy supplement to his regular diet that he would otherwise not receive. Although he enjoys everything he gets, his favorite items include apples, oranges and grapefruit. According to Sr. Baergas, "Without this program I would not be able to eat such good fruits and vegetables."

The \$10.00 SFMNP coupon benefit can provide him with potatoes, onions, pears, apples, peaches, lettuce and both red and green grapes; the three packages of fresh quality produce weigh about 20pounds. Sr. Baergas figures this will last him about a month and he still has another \$10.00 coupon left to redeem when his fresh produce runs out.



Lives Touched by the Aid for Friends Network.

Anna Rivera is very excited. The good people from Aid for Friends are going to stop by her house for a visit and to bring her fresh fruits and vegetables. Normally her regular Aid for Friends client caseworker, Hector, stops by once or twice a week to visit and watch the soaps with her on the local Hispanic television network.

Today is different. It's the first time that Anna will receive the benefits of the Seniors Farmers' Market Nutrition Program. The program provides low-income seniors with coupons that can be exchanged for eligible foods at farmers' markets, roadside stands, and community supported agriculture programs. To prepare, Ms. Rivera had her produce shopping list ready to go. She likes to try new things and is willing to sample a little bit of everything on the list provided by the Philadelphia Corporation for the Aging, the local agency responsible for operating the Senior Farmers' Market Program in the area. She has a favorite, eggplant, and she is happy to see that this is on the list of available produce.

Ms. Rivera qualifies to participate in the Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP). But it is very difficult for her to get to a participating farmers' market to redeem her benefits. In order for her to receive these benefits on her own, Ms. Rivera would need to walk a few miles or take a bus to the closest grocery store. This would not be possible for her, especially in the heat of the summer or the cold of winter. Two years ago, Aid for Friends in cooperation with federal, state, and local agencies was able to act as an intermediary to provide Ms. Rivera with the benefits of the SFMNP. Now she enjoys both the companionship of the folks from Aid for Friends and, thanks to the program, fresh produce. As Rivera says, "I love the program's variety and convenience. It provides a great service and lots of good stuff to eat."

"People need these kinds of programs, especially the seniors," says Ms. Rivera (left). Ms. Rivera believes that Aid for Friends provides her and other homebound seniors with a great service. She is thrilled with the amount of produce that she received, loves the variety, and the convenience of getting the produce delivered by the people from Aid for Friends. She received sweet potatoes, pears, lettuce and tomatoes. Of course, the folks from Aid for Friends were sure to pick up two nice fresh eggplants for her to enjoy. Rivera is very excited; she is looking forward to cooking up a nice fried eggplant dinner.

How the Initiative is Helping.

In early 2003, Director Tom Wallin heard about FNS' faith based initiative at a conference and he contacted the Mid-Atlantic regional office's Faith and Community Liaison. Aid for Friends was already a participant in FNS' The Emergency Food Assistance Program, and the staff understood the benefits of the Food & Nutrition Service programs. But they were looking for a way to supplement the diets of their clients by providing fresh fruits and vegetables.

During further discussions with FNS, Aid for Friends learned about the Senior Farmers' Market Program as a way to meet the needs of their clients. But, they still had a participation barrier: their clients' inability to leave their homes in order to apply for and receive the benefits. To remove this barrier, FNS investigated the possibility of Aid for Friends acting as an administrative proxy to allow the elderly shut-ins to receive their coupons.

After a few meetings the Philadelphia Corporation for the Aging--the non-profit organization that administers the Senior Farmers' Market Program to over 36,750 area seniors annually--agreed to take Aid for Friends as a recipient agency.

Thus a novel partnership between the Food & Nutrition Service, the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, the Philadelphia Corporation for the Aging and Aid for Friends was born.

Mission.

Aid for Friends' mission is to serve low income, isolated shut-ins, primarily the frail elderly, in the five county Greater Philadelphia area. Weekly, empathetic volunteer visitors deliver free home-

The Organization.

Aid for Friends was founded in 1974 by Rita Ungaro-Schiavone in response to the nutritional and social needs of the poor and elderly homebound in a disadvantaged section of lower Northeast Philadelphia. At first, Aid for Friends was part of St. Jerome Social Outreach Services and its purpose was to provide daily home-cooked

dinners, increased nutrition and opportunities for socialization. Incorporated in 1976 as a community based non-profit inter-faith charity, Aid for Friends is based on a system of volunteer support. All of their meals and services have been, and still are, free to shut-in client/friends.

They reached a landmark in 2004: thirty years of free home-cooked meals, compassionate visiting and supplemental outreach. During that time they have delivered more than 11,750,000 free meals to over 11,900 shut-ins and their volunteers have provided more than 1.5 million hours of compassionate visits with their shut-in client/friends.

Aid for Friends started simply in the founder's home. For 18 years, Rita served daily free home-cooked frozen dinners and made friendly weekly visits without financial compensation. But from the start, the program was dynamic, enlarging

Stats.

Number of participants: 200

Founded in 1974

its scope of services to meet the needs of the frail, elderly and disabled homebound. Headquarters were originally located in the Frankford YWCA, and then moved to the St. Jerome Mobile Units. From there the organization moved again to the Holme Circle Shopping Center, and is now the Aid for Friends Frail Elderly Outreach Center in Northeast Philadelphia..

“That’s the way it is with the nonprofit world, you do what you have to and pitch in.”

The Aid for Friends adult volunteer network of 1,600 cooks, drivers, visitors, coordinators, offices and maintenance personnel is unparalleled because of their free and loving support. Additionally, youngsters from nearly 555 school and youth organizations volunteer on an on-going basis throughout the year. Currently, 263 Catholic and Protestant churches, eight synagogues and many religious, social,

fraternal and civic groups actively participate in their network of volunteers. In addition, many other groups schedule Aid for Friends volunteer Projects once or twice throughout the year. According to Assistant Executive Director Tom Wallin, “That’s the way it is with the nonprofit world, you do what you have to and pitch in.”

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Thus a novel partnership between the Food & Nutrition Service, the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, the Philadelphia Corporation for the Aging and Aid for Friends was born. The result: homebound seniors can now receive their coupons thorough a proxy system. “I’m grateful to USDA for helping me give my seniors a treat”, says Aid for Friends’ Executive Director and founder Rita Schiavone-Ungaro.

Today, program benefits are delivered by Aid for Friends volunteers to 200 clients. Now seniors can reap the benefits of farm fresh produce. And this service is being expanded annually.

Staff at the Philadelphia Corporation for the Aging appreciates the hard work at Aid for Friends. The Corporation looks forward to working with Aid for Friends for many years to come.